

NUS retains top spot as Asia's best university in Times Higher Education ranking, NTU drops two spots



NUS is the top university in Asia. TODAY file photo

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SINGAPORE — The National University of Singapore (NUS) has held on to its place as the top university in Asia in the latest Times Higher Education Asia University Rankings released on Thursday (March 16), despite "very tough competition" from Chinese universities this year.

This is the second consecutive year that NUS has been crowned the top university in Asia, after it first overtook the University of Tokyo in 2016.

Meanwhile, the growing strength of Chinese universities saw Nanyang Technological University (NTU) drop from joint-second in the rankings to fourth spot this year. NTU was overtaken by both Peking University and Tsinghua University, despite seeing an overall improvement on its score.

The gap between NUS and Peking University has also narrowed. In 2016, NUS' overall score was 77.4 compared to Peking's 72.9. Both universities' scores improved this year, with NUS at 80.6 while Peking's was 77.5. NTU's score went up from 72.9 to 74.2, while Tsinghua's jumped from 70.9 to 76.8.

Mr Phil Baty, the editor of the Times Higher Education rankings, commented: "China's Peking and Tsinghua universities (have) improved by a larger margin (compared to Singapore universities), resulting in their second and third rankings, respectively, this year."

"This is largely due to the Chinese universities receiving much higher scores for their teaching and research, environments," he said.

Still, Mr Baty noted that Singapore's universities are "world class", and that "powerful policy drives" and investments have helped spur research excellence here.

"The city-state now spends 2.2 per cent of its GDP on research and development, up from 1.8 per cent in 2000 – more than China and the United Kingdom," Mr Baty said. "Singapore is one of the top performing nations in the table given its GDP."

NUS president Professor Tan Chorh Chuan said the university was very pleased to be recognised once again as Asia's leading university.

"This is a strong recognition of our Asian and global approach to education and research, as well as the importance we place on making a positive impact on the nation and the community around us.

"I am grateful to our outstanding faculty and researchers, and our talented students, for their excellent efforts, and for the strong support of the Singapore government. We will strive to ensure that NUS' education and research remain innovative and relevant to Singapore, Asia and beyond." Prof Tan said.

Meanwhile, NTU president Professor Bertil Andersson noted the "much keener" competition at the top when explaining the university's drop in the rankings.

"Some fluctuations each year are not unexpected when you are in the top league. I'm happy that NTU has performed better and has higher scores compared to last year. Compared to two years ago when we were placed 10th, we have made big strides up in the rankings, although not as much as last year," Prof Andersson said.

The top 10 universities in Asia this year are (in order) : NUS, Peking University, Tsinghua University, NTU, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, University of Tokyo, Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, Seoul National University, and Pohang University of Science and Technology.

This year's Times Higher Education Asia University Rankings judged the top 300 universities in Asia. A total of 24 countries made the list. Japan is Asia's top university nation overall with 69 featured institutions, followed by China with 54 and India with 33. East Asia dominates the top 20; China has six universities represented, South Korea and Hong Kong both have five, and Japan and Singapore have two each.

The regional rankings, which are based on the same performance indicators and methodology as the established Times Higher Education World University Rankings, uses 13 separate performance indicators to examine each university's strengths against its core missions of teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook. However, the weightings are specially recalibrated to reflect the priorities of Asian institutions, placing more importance on industry income and research income, and also on productivity in terms of publications.